

Back Again, Back Again: Gold, Part Three

Hey! It's Abigail Eliza. You're about to hear a trailer for the podcast The Children of Room 56 - because, y'all, it's so freakin good. If you're looking to fill the hole in your heart The Magnus Archives left behind or just love queer monster-y media, please give it a listen!! While season one doesn't start until next year, bonus episodes are coming out monthly right now and - I love them so much.

It, much like this show, is available wherever you get your podcasts. I'm gonna shut up now and just let y'all listen to the trailer.

ALEX

Spiritsford is a normal town. Just like yours or mine. It's a nice town. A nice, ordinary town.

It has everything a nice, normal, ordinary town should have. A school. A park. A river. Eyes. Teeth. Feelings.

The town watches. And the town knows. And it decides who gets to stay and who gets to leave.

And Spiritsford has eyes on every wall. Eyes that seem to follow you as you walk down the cobbled street.

You know you are being watched. You know you are being followed. But you carry on with your day. Because, of course, this is just a normal town. And these are all just normal town things. And,

obviously, our townsfolk are normal, too. Just ask the local wizards. They'll tell you themselves that everything going on here is perfectly normal.

And there's nothing strange going on here at all.

[THE MUSIC STOPS]

[CLICK]

SAM

Hello? Is uh, is this thing on? [Sigh.] It was always Chip who did the recordings and I... well, I suppose that's my job now. Now that he's gone. [Beat.] That's... uh... That's the reason I started recording in the first place, actually. [Beat.] Chip Romero is missing. Dead, apparently. [She laughs.] I don't believe that for one second. He's alive and I know it. And I'm going to find him.

[CLICK]

[MUSIC STARTS AGAIN]

ALEX

The Children of Room 56 is distributed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-Sharealike 4.0 International License. It is written and directed by Alex Abrahams and edited by Gwyn Grillo, Stoker Leopold, Alin P and Ori Gambardella.

In this trailer, you heard the voices of Alex Abrahams as himself and Tam Silverman as Sam Moss.

You can find us on Instagram, Twitter, TikTok and Tumblr @/room56pod and you can email us at thechildrenofroom56@gmail.com.

Thank you so much for listening. We really appreciate it.

[**FX:** voices chatter in the background. Music begins, a simple repeating pattern, bright and cheery. It is "Nightingales" by Pierce Murphy.]

Abigail, as the intro: Back Again, Back Again, episode nineteen: Gold, part three.

[**FX:** Music fades out. A click of a cassette tape-style recorder turns on, and the machine begins to whirr underneath the rest of the audio.]

Ilyaas: My headache recessed to a bearable thud as evening came, and as Cassian knocked on my door I pulled myself to my feet, still a little shaky -- like how you feel hours after a battle, after a competition, after strenuous activity: exhausted yet -- wired. Ready for sleep. Ready for round two. I steadied myself as spots danced in front of my eyes for a solid few

seconds, but recovered my sight and met Cassian at the door with a smile.

This time, there was no subtle compliment to our clothing: my dress was the same blue as his, had the same amount of golden accents, was made of a material with the same richness to it. Who we were -- what we represented, together -- who I belonged to: it was on display. It was meant to be shown.

He offered me his arm as we stepped into the hallway, and I hesitated for a second too long before taking it. The events of the previous night flashed starkly in both of our minds, and we froze -- deer in headlights looking at a deer in headlights, problem and spotlight both -- before I coughed and began to tug him along. *There, I thought. Crisis averted. For now.*

Because we'd both had time to reevaluate, as we'd said, and, what's more, daylight had passed by into evening. Logic and reason. Logic and reason -- and -- yet -- my feelings hadn't changed.

There were more important things to tell him first, though. Not because I was a coward. Because I had priorities.

I found my magic, I blurted out, before Cassian could say a word about anything else. He stopped dead.

What?

I found my magic, I repeated. *I can... I can use it. On purpose.*

Cassian broke into a grin. *Ilyaas, that's wonderful. Can you show me?*

Here? I asked. I pursed my lips and thought of my vomiting-and-brain-leakage of the afternoon. My body needed longer to recover than a few hours -- I could feel in my gut that it wouldn't be a good idea to press my luck, not if I wanted to be able to give that speech, look presentable, not cry, not throw up on Cassian's shoes.

He frowned. *Is there something wrong with... here?*

No -- yes -- I rubbed a hand across my face. *I've spent a lot of time doing magic -- the word still gave me a thrill, churned my stomach into excitement -- today, and it had... poor side effects, the longer I used it. I think the same thing'll happen now if I try.*

Cassian nodded. *I see. Are you sure?*

Yes, I snapped, then apologized as he recoiled. Yes. *I'm certain.*

It's okay. Be safe, yes?

I grinned. *Of course. I'll try.*

We began walking again -- he bumped my shoulder with his own, an action we'd done a thousand times before, and I turned my face up to his to laugh only to find that he was -- right there. Looking back down at me. And we were far too close, and it was the middle of the night and we were dancing and -- I

whipped my head back down to stare at my feet, barely visible beneath my dress. My face burned.

Is this okay? What do you want? I wanted to shout, but I was the one that had stepped away. And yet what was it he'd said? *I don't think that was a mistake.*

I suppose I knew what he'd wanted. I supposed I knew what I wanted. It was just a matter of when we'd stop dancing around it and actually spit out the words.

It wasn't on the walk down to the ballroom, though. It wasn't as we swept into the room or as Cassian and I began to talk to the people gathered in the room -- or, as Cassian talked, and translated, and I smiled and pretended to be better at Rhysean than I was, though even that was better than Cassian knew I did. I trotted out my pleasantries and tried not to act shocked the first time English came out of a courtier's mouth. It was nothing: a *hello*, simple, but my ears latched onto it. The more I listened, the more I heard as three phrases fell from the mouths of the people gathered, over and over, in English: Hello. Thank you. My sovereign.

Said like they were meant to impress. Said so eyes flicked to Cassian and I every time they were used, judging our reactions, searching for our -- approval? Contempt? Something.

And they were -- odd, to hear. Heavily Rhysean, vowels rounded. But it was more than that: the last one. *My sovereign*. Directed to me.

It was Odd. Wrong. Because, one, I wasn't. Two, it seemed to imply certain things about relationships and... such... that Cassian and I were currently making a point of avoiding -- but, even then, kissing a pretty boy does not make you ruler of a country.

And three -- that phrase. *My sovereign*. I can't understand how the context for it would arise other than being deliberately introduced as... what? Some sort of linguistic power play? I mean, look at what they knew: to greet -- hello -- to show deference -- thank you -- to give power away -- my sovereign.

At the time, I hadn't noticed the significance of the first two, had simply shocked myself into a stupor over *my sovereign* and the realization that I was still holding Cassian's arm and, gods, we *matched*, what kind of friends did that --

But here -- with nothing else to do but contemplate and speculate and realize all of the things I missed, I've given more weight to those words than they have any right to carry.

I trailed Cassian as he made his circuit -- because who else did I know, with Rhia upstairs? I stood apart, avoided the prying eyes of dignitaries and courtiers when I could, waited for his conversation to cease so I could join him as we moved on. I

was antisocial and grumbly, something better suited to a rogue at the back of a bar in a newbie DnD campaign, but my headache had picked up with my sword upstairs and I very sharply felt its loss. It reduced my patience to near-nothing, so I had even less interest in pretending I didn't notice their stares than usual.

That's when I saw *her*. It took me a moment to place her face, just another among a room of vaguely familiar figures in nice clothes, but --

My heart seized in my chest.

It was the girl from the tavern -- the one Rhia had brought to our table. The one she had played cards and laughed over Traem with. She wore an embroidered dress of lilac purple, a compliment to her warm brown skin. Her hair was braided up and around her face, crown-style -- beautiful, but simpler than that of the cortiers that circled the room.

Cassian's comment that locals from the surrounding villages had been invited as a placificity, a gift, came back to me, along with several rather creative curses. I had told Cassian -- I had told the queen -- that we never made it past the edge of the castle ground. And here was one of the few people in Rhysea that could've confidently disproved that.

Please don't come over here, I thought, shutting my eyes and sending up a prayer to whatever gods of stupid girls existed.

She came over. I thought a few more nasty curses -- and added a couple out loud, after realizing no one would know what they meant.

Hello, she said in English, eyes flicking over me. *My sovereign*. The words were sharp in her mouth, a joke and an insult more than any sort of deference.

They were preferable in that form.

She cocked her head to the side, crossing her arms. In slow, drawn-out Rhysean, she asked me if I'd gotten back from the *Eligidanim Traem* okay.

I opened my mouth and stuttered out a Rhysean response that didn't make sense in my own head, much less to someone who understood its grammatical structure. She grinned.

Cassian materialized at my side, looping one arm through mine. *Are you okay?* He asked, in English, and I nodded, trying to send a message to this girl with my eyes not to say a word. He smiled at the girl, a polite princeling smile.

Her gaze darkened as she took in the way we stood -- close, familiar, Cassian over my shoulder in a way that couldn't be mistaken for anything other than *protective*. The girl gave a half-bow, barely considered polite, and repeated *my sovereign* with a sharp tongue.

Cassian stiffened.

You are from where? I cut in in Rhysean, before everything could fall apart. A default phrase. One of the few I could pull off the top of my head.

She responded, one-word. Cassian's face soured. *Around*, he translated, and asked her something else, but if she ever clarified what she meant in her response -- or let onto the fact that we'd met before -- he never translated.

The girl made an excuse and disappeared back into the crowd. Cassian frowned, sending all his annoyance into one very pointed look at the girl's retreating form, then straightened.

I tried to keep an eye on her as she weaved her way through the crowd, but she was soon swallowed up by the mass of people that crowded round and asked questions, trying to catch a moment with the prince and his soldier as they moved across the floor. Cassian took the time to indulge them, because he always did, answering their questions with his princeling smile, grabbing my hand and squeezing an apology as one man began to talk about me as if I wasn't there. He was going much too fast for Cassian to translate and wasn't making a point of including me in the conversation, anyways, but spent more than enough time staring and mentioning my name.

My title. *Vatakina Eligida*.

There were more interactions, a droning that I did my best to appear polite to as I kept searching for the girl, hoping

with everything in me -- with that tight sort of chest anxiety that makes you feel every one of your ribs -- that she didn't tell the queen. That she didn't mention it to the king -- or to anyone else at the party, for that matter. It could end badly for me -- worse for Rhia.

And then the queen was calling everyone to attention up on her dais. The crowd quieted, turned to face the kings, as Cassian and I drew through the crowd and up to their sides, taking the same places we did at court: I on the right off the king, Cassian on the left off the queen.

Speeches began. I knew I was last up, a treat thrown out to the gathered masses, but that knowledge only churned at my stomach. I knew why, of course, now knowing the exact contents of the letter: you can't announce a competition of monetary and influential gain and expect an audience of people captivated by money and influence to sit still, but I was afraid of forgetting the words or messing up my conjugations or forgetting the pacing that had been drilled into me and reverting, accidentally, in my fevered state, to the rap I'd created to memorize it.

Then it was my turn. I stepped forward, a closing act in a vaudeville show, and began to speak.

My accent was shit, this I know, and it was never more obvious to me than after listening to three people who had been

trained for Rhysean public speaking since birth. I thought through it as I went along.

The speech mentioned the rebels, mentioned the prophecy. Check, check. I introduced the competition to find the poet -- check. The crowd shifted, hissed with murmurs of anticipation, a whispered list of bards to patronize, before falling into less-silent silence as I continued.

The vatika eligida is looking to find her poet. It called Cassian the king and I the soldier, his loyal helper, his weapon. I serve him. I carry the sword from the tree and it is right.

And then -- it was the end. *Rellemom a Rex*. Thank your kings.

[**FX:** The whirr of the cassette machine fades out. "Nightingales" once more fades in, just as cheerfully.]

Abigail, as the outro: Back Again, Back Again is written and produced by me, Abigail Eliza. If you'd like to hear more about the show, visit us on Twitter, Instagram, or Tumblr @backagainpodcast or on Tik Tok @abigailelizawrites. Our outro music is Nightingales by Pierce Murphy from the album To Japan, and is licensed under an Attribution License. The song was retrieved from FreeMusicArchive.org. Visit the description of

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If you've made it this far, thanks for sticking around. You are important in this world and have a role no one else can fill. You are loved. I hope you have a wonderful day.